Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Teaching & Learning Processes

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Unmasking Whiteness: Progressing Toward Cultural Responsiveness Within a RTI Framework

Date: November 12, 2018
Time: 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Place: Boeing Auditorium, TLC

Abstract
Response to Intervention (RTI) developed out of educational policies and practices that comprise NCLB and IDEA. RTI is a system to ensure all students receive high-quality instruction that meets their needs, increases opportunities to learn, and prevents reading failure. A culturally relevant RTI framework offers the most promising pedagogical approach to quality instruction and educational equity. The purpose of this study was to understand, describe, and explore the intersection of culturally relevant practices and RTI. The research questions that guided this study were: What can be learned about a culturally responsive approach to RTI by listening to teachers’ perspectives and observing teachers’ practices?; And how do teachers interpret and enact state and local policies in ways that maintain responsiveness to students’ literacy learning?

Participants were teachers who incorporated culturally relevant practices into their interventions. Data sources included: In-depth interviews, field notes of intervention instruction, follow-up interviews, and documents related to practice. The constant comparative method was utilized for analyzing each data source (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Findings revealed tensions exist between legislations’ way of schooling and teachers’ way of responding to students. The nation’s focus on the achievement gap was perceived by teachers as a societal issue perpetuated by institutional racism, gaps in opportunity, and neglecting teachers’ knowledge. Teachers acknowledged the learned cultural behaviors of Whiteness and the events that helped them understand their privilege and biased views of others. At times, teachers disrupted the status quo and at other times reinforced it. Teachers were responsive to students by incorporating culturally relevant practices, although teachers varied in approach and degree of implementation. Culturally relevant adjustments included ways to connect learning to the known, utilizing and supporting language development, using materials to connect concrete and abstract concepts, and using various assessments to make instructional adjustments. This study sheds light on how teachers interpret and enact educational policies.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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